

Dennis Mema - Testimony Supporting SB 1017, HB 6575, and HB 6578

Thank you esteemed Chairs, co-Chairs, and ranking members of the Government Administration and Elections committee for the opportunity to submit brief testimony supporting SB 1017, HB 6575 and HB 6578.

My name is Dennis Mema. In my professional capacity an election technology policy analyst for the OSET Institute, a nonprofit, non-partisan, election technology research institute, I wish to direct the committee's attention to extensive written testimony in support of HB 6575, submitted by myself and OSET Board Advisor and principle election scientist, Assistant Dean of Mathematics at UC Berkeley, and notably the *inventor* of the risk-limiting audit, Dr. Philip Stark. I believe his testimony will serve as a valuable resource to both the General Assembly and risk-limiting audit working group if 6575 is passed.

Separately in my individual capacity as a Connecticut resident who cares deeply about ensuring we have free, fair, and secure elections, I'm personally speaking in favor of SB 1017 and HB 6578; these bills make meaningful progress towards the ultimate goals of equity and security in our elections.

With regard to SB 1017, I want to focus specifically on permanent ballot drop box availability, and a system to electronically submit election-related documents. These are small statutory changes that would materially increase both voting accessibility and convenience, and stimulate voter turnout,¹ which we should always strive to improve. According to a best-practices resource recently released by "CISA," the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, drop boxes serve as a reliable, secure, and effective alternative for voters that may not want, or be able to to mail their ballot out of security concerns about the postal system or concern that their ballot might not arrive in time by mail.² In the 2018 general election, the majority of rejected absentee ballots were held up due to missing a return deadline.³

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<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/democracy/reports/2018/07/11/453319/increasing-voter-participation-america/>

² https://www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/electionofficials/vbm/Ballot_Drop_Box.pdf Page 1

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<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/10/most-mail-and-provisional-ballots-got-counted-in-past-u-s-elections-but-many-did-not/>

If the state hopes to expand voting via absentee ballots, which the General Assembly has expressed interest in, we must ensure that all ballots be counted by giving options for voters to return them, especially in the last few days before the deadline.

The other aspect of this bill I wanted to touch on, allowing voters to submit election-related signatures electronically, is another smart move for Connecticut in the name of accessibility and modernization of a historically cumbersome process, provided it is limited in its scope to forms and applications only (not ballots). The U.S. government has allowed for the electronic transfer of this information for decades under the Uniformed and Overseas Citizen Absentee Voting Act, and many states already have voter-registration and absentee ballot-request systems online. As my election cybersecurity colleagues at OSET can attest, when following proper security procedures, there is very little risk involved.

Finally, in my individual capacity I note that HB 6578, which would re-enfranchise individuals discharged from confinement for felony convictions without the necessity of paying all related fines, makes a significant step forward in advancing equality in election participation. This bill would eliminate what many civil-rights and election-law scholars, including the Harvard Civil Liberties Law Review, consider to be a new-age poll tax, especially given the propensity of all US states to push the costs of the criminal justice system onto defendants, which are disproportionately people of color.⁴ This is just one aspect of the much larger problem of systemic racism within our election infrastructure and administration,⁵ but addressing this issue moves us as a whole towards election equality for all Americans.

Thank you for your time. I'd be happy to answer any questions you have to the best of my ability.

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<https://harvardcrl.org/the-new-poll-tax-how-wealth-based-disenfranchisement-persists-in-the-united-states/>

⁵ <https://www.osefoundation.org/research/2020/28/05/racisminelections>